LEGENDS of FAITH

Famous PREACHERS *and* EVANGELISTS

Marilyn Boyer

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Introduction

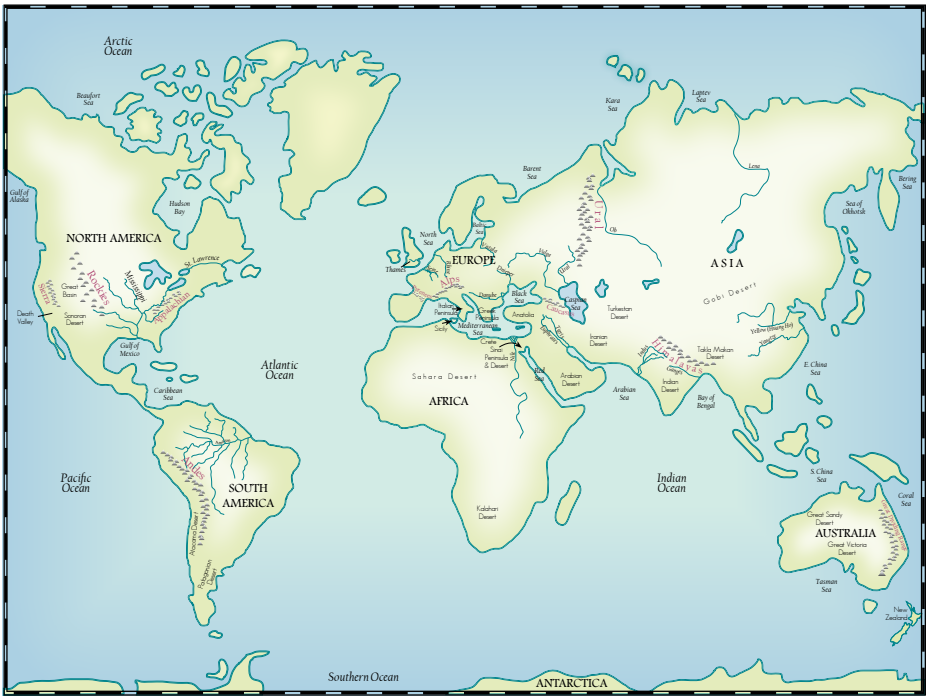
In this book you will learn of 10 famous preachers and **evangelists**. They were all used powerfully by God to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. They came from various **denominations**, but all had one essential thing in common: they did not waver on the **fundamental** principles of the gospel.

evangelists: Preachers who often travel to share the gospel

denominations: A distinct religious body identified by traits such as a common name, structure, leadership, and doctrine.

fundamental: Basic, central

Through the years and generations since Jesus Christ died and rose again, God preserved the blessed message of the gospel. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His final instructions to His followers. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all



things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20, KJV)

John 3:16 **encapsulates** the message. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (NASB 1995)." Even though Jesus never sinned, God treated Him as if He were guilty of every sin committed by any person who would ever believe on His name. Jesus willingly died in our place. He took the penalty (suffering or loss imposed in response to a crime or offense) for our sin by His death on the cross. Jesus bore our sins so we could bear His righteousness and be allowed to enter His holy heaven. We are given the privilege to serve Him with our lives; or

encapsulates: expresses the essential features of

as 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to *be sin* on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (NASB 1995)."

Although the men in this book did not always agree on every point of doctrine, they did agree on this life-giving message. For instance, some believed in **Calvinism**, some **Arminianism.** Some believed in infant baptism and others in the **immersion** of the believer. Sometimes they were at odds with others who believed differently but, in the end, God used all these men to carry His gospel to the ends of the earth. There are some things we will not know until we get to heaven. What we must be clear on is how we get to heaven.

Calvinism: the belief that God predetermines who will be saved

Arminianism: the belief that affirms human free will regarding salvation

immersion: submersion in water

George Whitefield and John Wesley had some strong disagreements about points of doctrine during their lives but reconciled with the following conclusion, best summed up by a statement John

Wesley made in 1770 while speaking at George Whitefield's memorial service. Wesley praised Whitefield's admirable qualities while acknowledging the two men's differences: "There are many doctrines of a less essential nature … In these we may think and let think; we may 'agree to disagree.' But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials …"[1]

Their mutual respect was illustrated when someone asked Whitefield if he thought he would see Wesley in heaven. Whitefield replied, "I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance, we shall hardly get sight of him."[2]

It is truly amazing to see the **ingenuity** displayed by God as He uses man created in His image to accomplish His purposes on earth. It is encouraging to see how God directed their paths. Proverbs 16:9 tells us, "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the LORD directeth his steps"(KJV). We have much to learn from these men about prayer, dedication, and sacrifice. May you, the reader, be inspired

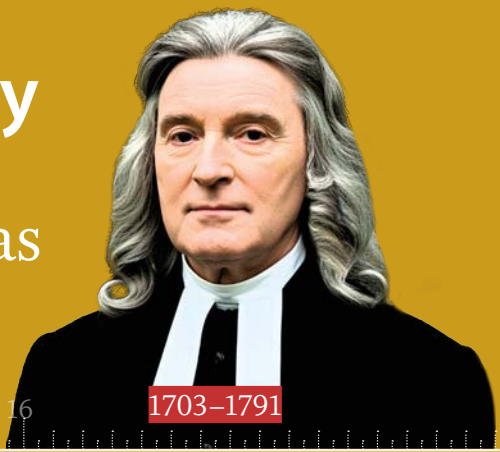
ingenuity: the skill and imagination to create new things

to commit your life to serving our living Savior. He wants to use your life to bring honor and glory to His name, just as He did these heroes of the faith.

1

John Wesley

His Parish Was the World



1703–1791

A.D. 1450 1500 1550 1600 16

"I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Epworth, England – Born in 1703, Wesley grew up in a strong Anglican home where his mother, Susanna Wesley, played a key role in his education and faith.

Oxford, England – Studied at Oxford University and formed the "Holy Club," which laid the foundation for the Methodist movement.

Bristol, England – Preached in open-air meetings, marking the beginning of his evangelical ministry.

London, England – Established the Methodist movement and built Wesley's Chapel, which remains a key historical site. There, he passed away in 1791 at the age of 87.

Who Was John Wesley?

An English preacher and evangelist, John Wesley was used by God to convict his nation of its sin and lead people to faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He traveled over a quarter of a million miles on his horse, preaching 42,000 sermons, often at outdoor meetings. He led a congregation of his own as well, and his ministry impacted multiple other congregations in England and even in America. He was the author of 232 books. He is known as the father of the Methodist denomination.

Early Years

John Wesley was born on June 17, 1703, to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was a fiery preacher, and Susanna was devoted to training her children in the **admonition** of the Lord. As soon as her children could talk, she began having them memorize large portions of Scripture. On their fifth birthday, she started teaching them to read from the Bible. She taught her children from nine in the morning until five in the evening. They were allowed a two-hour lunch break. Susanna had given birth to 14 children by the time John was born, although some died in infancy. When John was only five years old, his

admonition: teaching and instruction

family suffered a house fire that destroyed their home and almost killed John.

Plucked from the Burning Fire

John's sister Hetty awoke when a burning timber landed at the foot of her bed. She quickly woke her parents, who began leading the children safely outside. However, as the fire raged, they noticed that five-year-old John was not with them. Samuel attempted to run back into the flaming house, but the flames prevented him from entering. A neighbor spotted little John, who had woken up and gone to the bedroom window crying for help. No ladders were available. The neighborhood men stood on each other's shoulders until, finally, one man was able to snatch little John and hoist him safely to the ground. John rejoined his family. Samuel exclaimed, "This boy is a brand plucked from the burning fire! Let us give thanks to God. He has given me my eight children. Let the house go. I am rich enough."[3] John always attributed his rescue to the Hand of **Providence** and felt God had special plans for his life.

Providence: reference to God working in our lives

The next morning, Samuel realized that he, his pregnant wife, and eight children, aged one to 17, were homeless and penniless. The children were divided up among family members and willing church members until the family was able to get on their feet again. It took a full year for the Wesleys to be reunited under one roof.

Off to School

When John was 11, his parents sent him to the Charterhouse School in London. John soon gained a reputation for being a hard-working student. He was offered a scholarship at Christ Church, part of Oxford, when he was 17 years old. John stayed at Oxford after graduation to pursue a master's degree. About this time, he started to have questions about his spiritual condition. Attempting to pursue holiness, he set up a system of strict disciplines to follow. He felt this would gain him favor with God.

After he graduated, John was ordained by the church and began preaching. He had not yet placed his faith in Christ. He later

explained, "Preaching was defective and useless from 1725-1729. I neither laid the foundation of repentance nor of preaching the gospel, taking it all for granted that all to whom I preached were believers, and that many of them needed no repentance. I saw a little fruit. But—it was only a little—and no wonder; for I did not preach faith in the blood of the **covenant.**"[4]

covenant: a spiritual agreement or contract

Overseeing the Students

John received a letter in October 1729 requesting that he accept a position at Lincoln College to oversee the spiritual condition of its students. He accepted, and here he found his brother Charles had started what became known as "The Holy Club" at Christ Church. There were only three members at the time. They devoted themselves to studying the Bible on Sunday nights. John eagerly became their leader and set up rules to help the men evaluate their behavior and their spiritual heart condition. Soon, they met twice a week to study the Bible from six to nine o'clock. They

began the sessions by praying together before using the Greek New Testament to search the Scriptures. Membership in the club grew. Someone started calling them Methodists. John explained that to be called a "Methodist" meant "one that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible."[5] They decided to fast twice a week, devoting themselves to prayer. They also reached out to those in need and visited prisoners. They invited George Whitefield to join their club, which he was happy to do. During this time, George found new life in Christ. The Holy Club was the beginning of the Methodist Church which would soon spread to America.

Mission to America

John met James Oglethorpe, founder of the British colony of Georgia in America. Oglethorpe appealed to him to come to Georgia, a settlement desperately in need of spiritual teaching. He recruited several men to go with him, including his brother Charles. John made sure the men followed strict disciplines on the trip, studying the Bible earnestly. After arriving safely, John

assumed his mission would be to bring the gospel to Native Americans. Instead, he was directed to minister to the English settlers. He preached his first sermon instructing the **parishioners** in the strict disciplines they must follow. Such rigid rules were not accepted well in the colony, and he was not well-liked. He became discouraged and soon headed back to England. He felt that he had failed in America. However, God, in His Providence, was about to open the door of salvation to John. He later said, "I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted."[6]

parishioners: church members

wrestled: deeply considered

Moravian: a member of the Moravian Church, one of the oldest Christian denominations

John Becomes a Christian

John met Peter Bohler, a **Moravian** minister who was headed to preach in America. He challenged John about his salvation, claiming that a man is saved by the grace of God and nothing else. John **wrestled** with the thought. He attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street one evening and listened as the preacher was reading from Martin Luther's preface to the Book of Romans. As Bohler began to describe the change God works in a person's heart through faith in Christ, John was moved. "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."[7]

From that time forward, John preached the message, "By grace you are saved through faith."[8] The Church of England was not pleased with this radical message. By the end of the year, he was allowed only to preach in three or four pulpits of the Church of England. However, small Methodist societies began springing up, some led

by men who had been members of the Holy Club. One night they were joined by George Whitefield. They all prayed and sang well into the night. Whitefield wrote of this night, "We continued in fasting and prayer until 3 o'clock, and then parted with the conviction that God wants to do great things among us."[9]

Preaching to the Crowds

The Church of England finally **forbade** Wesley to preach in their parishes. He explained, "God in Scripture commands me according to my power to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish; that is in effect, to do it at all, seeing I have no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom then shall I hear: God or man? I look upon the world as my parish. Thus far… it is my **bounden** duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation."[10]

forbade: not allowed to do something

bounden: bound to a promise or principle

Wesley began preaching in the open air, as Whitefield had done. He preached approximately 400 sermons in six months. He and Charles preached between London and Bristol to extremely large crowds. Lives were changed. God's Word was proclaimed to all. John

wrote in his journal about the transformation of the people in Kingswood, an area known for its extreme vileness: "The scene is already changed. Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness and the idle diversions that lead thereto. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness, of wrath and envyings … Hardly is their voice heard in the streets; or indeed in their own wood; unless when they are at their usual evening diversion—singing praise unto God their Savior."[11] The gospel was changing lives.

Methodist Constitution

John decided he must write a constitution to govern the Methodist societies that were springing up. He wrote rules for how men and women should act if they wished to be considered Methodists. The number of people wanting to become Methodists grew, as did opposition to the movement. Mobs formed to pelt Methodist preachers with rotten eggs, slop fed to hogs, and rotten vegetables.

John began traveling to encourage the preachers. One mob threatened to kill him. John boldly stood on a chair in the middle of the town and called out to the mob. "What evil have I done? Which of you all have I wronged in word or deed?"[12] He continued preaching for 15 minutes

and ended with a prayer. When he finished, one of the leaders of the mob came forward, moved by John's words. He said, "Sir, I will spend my life for you. Follow me and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head."[13] Seven others stepped forward also, promising to protect him.

Helper to the People

John was involved in many projects to bring relief to ordinary people. He established an orphanage in Newcastle. He opened a clinic where poor people could get appointments with a doctor and receive proper medicines. He wrote a book on health to help make people's lives better. He traveled on horseback to distribute his book. He helped to open a school for miners' children. He was instrumental in opening a school for the sons of Methodist preachers to help raise the next generation of preachers. In 1746, he set up a fund to give loans to poor Methodists. He helped 225 people in the first 18 months. In 1747, John began a ministry to Ireland.

In 1763, John began writing what eventually was called *Large Minutes*, a document outlining Methodist beliefs and practices that served as a standard for years to come. Every Methodist preacher received a copy as a guide for conducting himself in society. John,

now 61 years old, loaded documents into his saddlebags again and set out on horseback to distribute them throughout England. The trip was strenuous. Although he was getting old, he still rode about 3000 miles per year, preaching more than 800 sermons.

John sent two **itinerate** Methodist preachers to America to organize Methodist societies there. One of the men he sent was Francis Asbury, who had come from a lower-class family in England. John was thrilled to see the first Sunday school organized for children in 1769. Hannah Ball, one of John's followers, started a school for children to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and Bible knowledge. John strongly believed every child should learn to read so all children could read the Bible for themselves.

itinerate: traveling minister

How could John Wesley write so many books while traveling and preaching? John knew the country roads of England by heart. Even as an old man, John often read a book, wrote letters, or scratched down sermon notes while riding his horse at an easy pace. He trusted his faithful mount to know the way. He took good care of his horse each night and insisted that his fellow ministers do the same. John was well paid for the sale of his books but always lived a simple lifestyle. Although

he often earned 1400 pounds a year, he kept only 30 pounds and gifted the rest to Methodist charities. When questioned why he did not keep more for himself, he replied, "Money never stays with me: it would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find a way into my heart."[14]

John Presses On

In August 1773, John took a trip to America and preached to 32,000 people, the largest audience he ever had. John traveled and preached until a ripe old age. On his 87th birthday, he wrote about his physical decline over the last year. "My eyes were so dim that no glasses would help me. My strength likewise quite **forsook** me and probably will not return in this world. But I feel no pain from head to foot; only it seems nature is exhausted and, humanly speaking, will sink more and more till 'the weary springs of life stand still at last.' "[15]

forsook: something left or abandoned

John was often sick with coughs and colds during the winter of 1791. On March 1, he asked for a pen and paper but did not have the strength to write. The following day, leaders of the Methodist church came to his bedside. John lifted his arms skyward and pronounced a blessing on them. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; that this heir of glory shall come in."[16] Those were his last words. Tens of thousands of mourners came to pay their last respects to this leader of men. John Wesley shared the gospel of Christ with millions and was the father of a movement that spread God's love and the message of holy living around the globe.